



LEIGHTON BUZZARD
Urban District Council.

Annual
Report

OF THE
MEDICAL OFFICER OF HEALTH,

For the Year 1898.

TO THE
URBAN DISTRICT COUNCIL
OF
LEIGHTON BUZZARD.

GENTLEMEN,

I have pleasure in presenting my Annual Report for 1898. The year presented some remarkable features. Being very mild and dry weather in the early part of the year, rain coming in the latter part of March, which as so often happens, produced (under such provoking conditions as an offensive river running behind unsanitary cottages in Union St.) an outbreak of Typhoid Fever, which, however, did not invade the town, except a few cases in Plantation Road. A drought, then rain, then the Typhoid under conditions conducing to its spread. An out-break of Measles occurred in February, necessitating the closing of all the Schools for some weeks, but which presently got all right. With regard to this matter an anonymous letter appeared in a May number of the *Observer* to say: "Why had not the Medical Officer mentioned the fact of the Measles Epidemic in his Annual Report for 1897?" Anonymous letters are not worth answering, or I should have said: "Because the Measles was *not* one of the events of 1897 at all, but February, 1898"; and I had also an anonymous post card to the same effect, both obviously from same hand.

The harvests of the year were, in the main, good and plentiful—hay and corn—and were well gotten. Fruits, scarce, such as apples and plums. It is unfortunate when so useful a fruit as the apple falls short, as it is more thought of hygienically than ever it was, it being

considered to be a food about equal to the potato, in addition to its properties as a sweetener to the blood. The plum—that is the Prune Damson—being an industry special to the neighbourhood between our town and Dunstable, is an important feature, and its loss in a year means impairment of many a small income, and a difficulty to pay the rent. The summer was followed by a singularly hot autumn, the heat of August being greater than usual in that month, followed by a September of higher temperature still, the hottest September for fifty-seven years; resulting in a lowering of the springs, through the lengthened, unexampled drought, that even for many weeks after rain began to fall, as far indeed as the third week in the new year, the inhabitants of a village, four miles from Luton, had to be supplied with water from Luton itself. The grievous results to the public health from these recurring droughts in making the water supply short, must force the question on public opinion, as to whether village localities should be left to their miserable surface wells at all, and should not participate in a comprehensive supply such as that from Wales to London, which will pass presumably within a few miles of our town, and could be made to supply the several localities as it passes through them; anyhow, it is impossible to overestimate the importance to the Public Health generally of plentiful and pure water.

With regard to the Births in the town for year 1898, they are 169, and one in the Union House, making 170, or at a rate of 25 per thousand. As to Deaths they are 115, but excluding Deaths (16) of persons dying in this neighbourhood amongst persons *not* belonging thereto, leaves 99, or at the rate of 14.55 per thousand. How different to 1891 when it was 21. A year or two ago it was below 13; varying circumstances and so on make a difference all the while. I notice that Hornsey for 1898 gives a rate of 8.7, whilst London is 18.4. Hornsey must be very fortunate.

The Zymotic Death Rate for our town is 3.52. This is high, but is explained by the Epidemic. The Epidemic of Typhoid in March caused a good deal of notice. It occurred in a low-lying part of the town—Union Street—near an offensive river, which had been used, under

the old system of drainage, as a sewer, and in hot seasons it runs nearly dry. The new connections take time to come about, but till they are complete the river must be still an open sewer, in whole or in part; but the Sanitary Inspector tells me the connections are nearly complete, and the Union Street property entirely connected. I made a Special Report of the outbreak of Typhoid, and which Report was sent to the Local Government Board. I strongly recommended the adoption of the Notification Act—your Council being the only Authority in Bedfordshire that refuses to adopt it,—further explaining that the Medical Officer had no opportunity of hearing of those three Typhoid cases till the attending Doctor (the Parish Doctor) wanted to have them removed to the Isolation Hospital. I urged increased and more hearty attention to the connecting of all properties with the new works, which policy has been, and is still being, pursued. And I took the further opportunity of urging the adoption of a system of *scavenging* for the town; and when a question came down from the Local Government Board to know if the Medical Officer's advice on this point had been taken, the reply sent back by your Council was, that it was *not* necessary. I can only hope and strongly urge that wiser counsels will obtain, and if your Council will not do it I think the Local Government Board will possibly issue a *mandamus* to compel its being done. In the old days of closet pits it were well perhaps for anything and everything to be put into them that those fever-breeding pits might be emptied the oftener, but now with a new and elaborate system of sewerage works, made and constructed for a certain purpose, to allow any amount of shop and other paper and vegetable refuse, to say nothing of ginger beer bottles being found in the ejectors, is to work up to a ruin of the new works; whilst your near and smaller neighbour Linslade has had scavenging for many years, although it has not, as yet, the advantage of a system of water and sewage works, only the pail system for closets, which, however, as a temporary arrangement, seems to work very well there. This parallel of a smaller township being more progressive, and in such a common-sense direction, is silently advising you to put in force such an obviously necessary reform as a system of *scavenging* in your district.

I congratulate you on clearing out the bed of the river from the chain bridge, removing the debris of the old sewage which had been allowed to accumulate. By removing so insanitary a condition, and such an obvious cause of Typhoid Fever, you will be the means of saving health and life.

In my Special Report on the Typhoid, I took the opportunity of alluding to the milk supply, dwelling on the importance of such a liquid food as milk is; how necessary in illness; how Typhoid patients can live upon it for the first few weeks (till the bowels are steady); how necessary in infant life; and, again, how easily it can be adulterated. How very susceptible it is of dissolving any matters, whether beneficial or injurious, with which it may be brought into contact. In this respect its solvency is even greater than water itself. Again, its purity and wholesomeness is, as may be imagined, dependent upon, and, in a great measure, reflecting the state of health (good or bad) of the animal from whence it is derived. Cows are very liable to the disease called *Tuberculosis*, which may be broadly described as the seed-bed of *Consumption* of the Lungs, the fell disease of our climate. Tuberculosis of the Udder is not uncommon amongst Milch Cows. It takes the form of *nodules* or *abscesses*; certainly the milk from such cows *must* contain Tuberculosis matter, and will injuriously affect those who drink it, especially young people. Of course, *Milk* can in all cases be purified by *sterilising*, that is, warming over a fire and removing before it boils, as boiling makes it indigestible. Harking back to Consumption, it has, I am glad to say, declined in mortality since Hygiene, both public and private, has seized on people's attention. It still, however, ranks amongst the most fatal diseases, and it would be a pity to allow neglected Tuberculosis in milk, that being a commodity which is so largely used, again to add to its prevalence.

Before leaving the subject of Consumption, I must again impress upon a governing body how greatly the condition of *dampness* tends to its prevalence. I have spoken in previous Health Reports how

low-lying Leighton is. This you cannot help ; water will run down hill ; but you ought not to allow the water to be stopped by mills which should be no nearer a town than two miles at least. The low-lying meadows between the Church and the Dunstable Branch Railway have been covered with flood-water up to quite lately, and such a condition tends strongly against the public health.

I find, on looking at my monthly reports, that a case of Typhoid was admitted in June from Plantation Road into the Hospital, and was discharged cured after some weeks detention.

I admitted on a Sunday in November three patients from a cottage in Plantation Road—man, wife, and child—into Hospital, Of these three patients the woman died, husband and child recovered. This, with the patient admitted in June, all came from the same terrace of houses ; and which terrace have, according to my advice, been connected with the New Sewerage and Water Works, and with the result, as I confidently expect, of no more Typhoid in that locality.

Our High Street has been treated with the Hobman's Tar Paving, result being a good hard firm road, which can readily be cleansed after Market and Fair days as required by the Chamber of Agriculture, and therefore conducive to the Public Health, by the greater cleanliness thereby obtained. Its durability has yet to be proved, but it is expected that its lessened necessity for frequent repair, as required in other roads, will conduce to economy, and make up for the large initial expenditure. Its noiselessness, too, is a good feature, especially when there is sickness in the houses adjacent.

I congratulate the Council on taking the filtration of the iron in the water so well in hand. Though the iron is not injurious, still it makes an unsightly appearance in the drinking water, and prejudices our people against its use. If the new filters, the use of which is now to be entered upon, can succeed in removing the iron after deposit, they will be abundantly worth the expense and trouble involved.

Mr. Lines, the Sanitary Inspector, furnishes me with the information hereunder :—

Number of plans approved—27 houses and 8 alterations.

Persons staying in lodging houses :—

	Males.	Females.
Henry Gurney, St. Andrew's Street ...	1916	234
Thomas Reeve, Workhouse Lane ...	871	639
B. Reeve, Mill Road	1080	249
George Panter, Bassett Road	2328	202
	<hr/> 6195	<hr/> 1324

SLAUGHTER HOUSES.—There are 8 recognised as registered slaughter houses, and 5 where killing is done, making ... 13

Number of inspections made were 20

OVERCROWDING.—There were cases of overcrowding ... 4

PIGS—Pigs kept, the same being a nuisance—Water Lane, 1 ; Cemetery Road, 1 ; Hartwell Grove, 1 3

COMPLAINTS made of offensive trades—boiling of offal ... 3

NOTICES, calling upon people to lime-whiten cottages. These were all complied with 16

Number of premises inspected, having defective drainage ... 150

Number of notices served to drain premises and lay on water of these 138

Those who complied were 123

Number of connections to the New Sewers from January 31st, 1897, to January 31st, 1898, were 203

Cesspools emptied 6

Pit Privies cleaned 13

FISH.—Unfit for food of man, namely four cases of Mackerel, each containing 200 800

MANURE.—Heaps of Manure removed 4

ASH PITS.—Ash pits emptied were 20

I beg to remain, Gentlemen,

Your obedient servant,

J. A. HEDGES, M.R.C.S., &c.,

MEDICAL OFFICER.